

Personality Praying

Personality Praying...What Is That?

I don't know that I have ever done anything that would qualify as heroic, unlike my brother who has been heroic many times. In 2001, after the events of 9/11 took place, all nonmilitary flights were stopped for several weeks. Our nation had to determine that passengers who flew would be safe from terrorism and systems needed to be put in place to protect our nation. I was scheduled to spend two weeks teaching at a Bible college in Moscow, but I was not sure if the travel ban would be lifted in time for me to go. As it turned out, five weeks before my teaching assignment was to begin, Americans were given the green light to fly. However, the Bible college, which was dependent on pastors from the US and Canada to come and teach the courses couldn't get the pastors scheduled to teach to fly to Moscow. They were too scared to get on a plane. Classes were scheduled every two weeks and the first two rounds of courses after 9/11 did not have the professors there to teach them. The school contacted me and my friend Dr. Mark Milwee to see if we would come teach our classes and we had to quickly give them an answer. As I prayed and my wife and I talked about it, I had to decide something. Who am I? What sort of person has God made of me and how would that person live? Our big idea for today is: Don't Shrink, Expand.

Personality is who you are and who you will be for eternity. It is not who you wish you were although that may impact the direction your personality takes in terms of growth and development, but it is in fact you as you are. The majority of people never reach their potential as personalities because they reject a key component of personality. Before Jesus faced His executioners, Scripture records a magnificent prayer He voiced aloud. He provided us valuable insight into what God intends in our relationship with Him. **"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."** (John 17: 13 NIV) Note that Jesus is not wanting to advance our joy levels. He is declaring that by leaving this world, we will have access to His own joy. He is not promising to teach us how to develop joy inside us but rather to infuse in our personality His very own joy. This is in fact a psychological transformation, a reworking of you. Imagine driving a Volkswagen Bug that has a Corvette engine put in it or opening the door to your home only to find out the interior is completely reworked so that it is now the inside of the White House. You may wonder how this might be possible, gaining the very joy of Christ. Later in His prayer Christ provides an insight you could not guess on your own. **I in them and you in me.** (John 17: 23a NIV) Do not take this lightly. Christ lives in His people. If you are born again, He lives in you. His personality is joined to yours so that you have access to what is in Him: His courage, His perseverance, His power over sin, His peace and of course, His joy. Paul made an equally stunning assessment of the personality of any believer. **But we have the mind of Christ.** (1 Corinthians 2: 16 NIV)

Few ever grasp the potential they have once they put their faith in Christ for salvation. Perhaps you will. Your personality includes not only you, but Jesus also joined with you. It is a supernatural union that though unseen is real. It takes faith to access what God makes possible in you. You would not be alone if you never enjoy the potential you possess as one of God's children, having Christ in you. That does not mean you have to live that way. You can uncover the power of Christ living in and through you if you are willing to do so. This brings me to a critical concept for you to grasp. Immanence. Immanence is a technical term that in Christianity means that Christ is present, is with us and in us. The ancient Hebrew name Immanuel hinted at this, "God with us". Personal immanence is the level of closeness you believe exists between you and God. Your view of Immanence and the way you live out what you think it is, determines how big your life is, how much of Christ lives through you. There are four levels of personal immanence being practiced.

Level one of personal immanence is absence. I have a niece who is at this level. She denies God exists and even if He does, she would not want to have anything to do with Him. God is irrelevant to her and she dislikes being around anyone who talks about Him or promotes Him. Level two of personal immanence is avoidance. You want to be as far from God as possible. You believe He exists, but you would prefer He was not in your life. Jonah the prophet was at this level. When the Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh to tell the people of the city that God's judgement was coming to them, Jonah tried to escape the prodding and disruptive influence of God. **But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.** (Jonah 1: 3 NIV) Level three of personal immanence is attachment. You attach God to certain places or situations. For example, King Solomon attached God to the Temple. Listen to a bit of his prayer when he dedicated the newly built Temple to God. **Then Solomon said, "The**

Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever." (2 Chronicles 6: 1-2 NIV) You might call that metaphoric speaking, that of course Solomon did not believe God only lived in the Temple he had built. However, Solomon's life spoke otherwise. As one of the great contributors to the Bible, Solomon practiced his faith perfectly in the Temple, offering sacrifices to God and making beautiful prayers. But outside the Temple, he lived as if God did not exist. Contrary to the Scriptures, he gathered great wealth as a king, married hundreds of women, contrary to the Scripture, and even worse, married pagan women. Add to all that the spread of paganism in Israel Solomon encouraged and supported. Yes Solomon was attached to God when he walked into the Temple but everywhere else he went on his own.

The fourth level of personal immanence is awareness. The Psalmist perfectly describes this. **Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.** (Psalm 139: 7-10 NIV) The revelation that God is everywhere you go and in each situation you face is profound. Many say they believe that is true but few live that way and that is the admonition of our key verse today, what we have examined for a couple weeks now. **Through all prayer and supplication, praying ones, in every time in the Spirit, and into this, being vigilant ones in all perseverance and supplications concerning all the holy ones.** (Ephesians 6: 18) We have considered six characteristics of the faithful follower of Jesus Christ found in this verse and here is the fifth one. It is Personality Praying. That is the gist of the expression, "praying ones". This is an indication that praying is a description of who you are, a characteristic of your personality. If you live as a praying one, it means you pray and pray and pray. It is how you live through the day and into the night. You are so aware of the presence of God that you align with Him constantly, think of Him everywhere, converse with Him continually. If you are a praying one, others start to notice. It is not because you go about praying out loud everywhere, but you have the personality that is so shaped by your life with God that people who want God, who need God, who are desperate to hear from God are drawn to you.

Personality praying is the aligning of your life with God so completely that difficulties, troubles, and even riches or success do not shake you from Jesus. With personality praying, prayer is who you are, not what you do. Dr. Nathaniel recently mentioned Job and his response to suffering. After Satan threw at Job external suffering, the loss of his wealth and his children, Job was met with internal suffering, the ruin of his body through pain. I recently experienced a pinched nerve and the pain in my upper leg and lower back was so excruciating that I could think of almost nothing else. Pain was who I was. Job was wracked by pain in every part of his body. What has long struck me about Job is that despite his great suffering, pain never became who he was. Job's thoughts were fixed on God. Job knew God was there in it all and He would make things right. Job's entire personality was caught up in God which explains His laser focus on the Lord. A second example of personality praying is Abraham. We love to go over and over the accounts of Abraham and we marvel at his faithfulness but at the same time he does not seem mystically above us. Abraham is one of us. He is someone you could hang out with and despite his gigantic faith, it would be comfortable having him as a friend. One moment stands out in his life that shows me just how completely aligned he was with God in prayer. At some point God told him to kill as a sacrifice his only son with his wife Sarah. **Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."** (Genesis 22: 2 NIV) How did Abraham know it was God telling him to sacrifice his son? Only someone whose entire personality is locked in on God could be certain of that. What amazes me is that there is no hint in the Bible that Sarah ever questioned Abraham on this. She trusted Abraham as completely as he trusted God because in some way that we may not understand, Abraham was so thoroughly aligned with God that he was God for her. Personality prayer is the determined focus on Christ that is so concentrated that nothing distracts you from the guidance and fellowship you have with Him. Our big idea for today is: Don't Shrink, Expand. As you focus on Christ, you become stronger, wiser, more honorable and loving, and the change in you will be noticed. As it was said of the disciples, so it will be said of you. That it is clear you have been with Jesus.